

Abstract

Borderline Personality Disorder (BPD) is characterized by affective instability, unstable relationships, self-damaging impulsive acts, and efforts to avoid abandonment. Population prevalence is 2%, but it is often diagnosed in those who report physical or sexual abuse histories. The etiology is not well understood and most research has been retrospective. Many diagnosed in adulthood did not exhibit BPD traits in childhood.

Rogosch and Cicchetti (2005) constructed a model with 11 dimensions of potential childhood precursors that constitute a vulnerability to BPD. They found maltreated children had higher mean BPD Precursors Composite Scores than nonmaltreated children, and children with higher levels of BPD precursors were more prevalent in the maltreatment group.

The current study uses proxy variables to assess the 11 dimensions of the BPD Precursors Composite in a sample of maltreated and nonmaltreated children.

Method

Design

Secondary analysis
Longitudinal Studies of Child Abuse and Neglect (LONGSCAN)

Sample

(n=1281)

Maltreated children (n=766)

Nonmaltreated children (n=515)

Survey of children, caregivers, and teachers at five US sites

Analyses

Maltreatment was indicated by an allegation report, ages 0-6.

The 11 dimension constructs were mapped from proxy variables and the traits were aggregated over ages 6-12. Multiple imputation addressed 16% missing dimension scores. The BPD Precursors Composite Score is a restandardized average of the 11 dimension z-scores. The High BPD Precursor score group consists of children with a Composite z-score at least one standard deviation above the mean. Non-parametric tests, t-tests, multivariate and logistic regressions were used.

Research Questions

1. Will maltreated children have higher BPD Precursors Scores?
2. Will more maltreated children meet the criterion to be in a High BPD Precursors Score group?
3. Will the findings of Rogosch & Cicchetti (2005) be replicated in this larger, national sample?
4. Will children who experienced neglect or emotional abuse be as likely to have a high BPD Precursors Score as those with sexual or physical abuse histories?

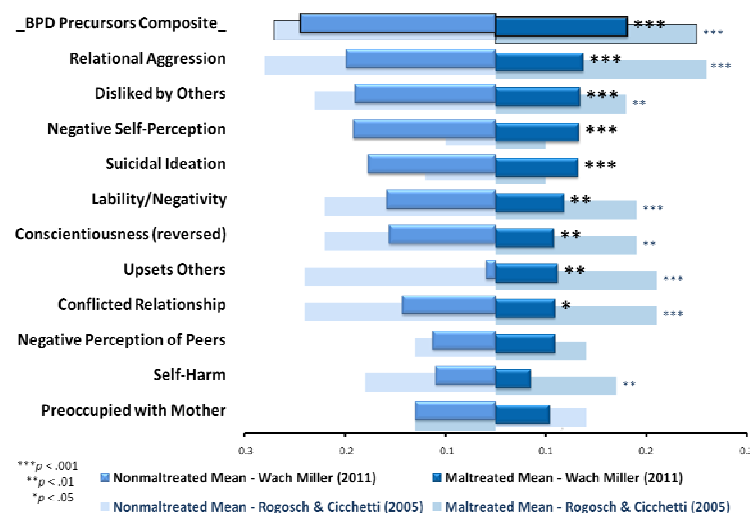
Identifying Precursors to Borderline Personality Disorder among Maltreated Youth

Diane Wach Miller, MEd, LPC and John Eckenrode, PhD

DianeMiller@cornell.edu

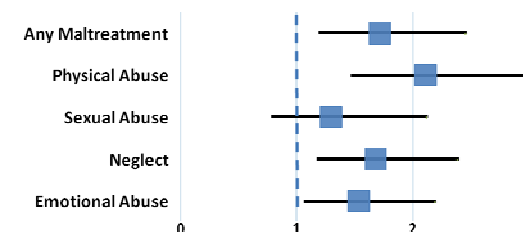
Results

Maltreated vs. Nonmaltreated Groups Standardized Scores of BPD Precursors Dimensions



Maltreated children had a higher mean BPD Precursors Composite Score than nonmaltreated children $t=5.58, p < .0001$. Maltreated children differed significantly from nonmaltreated on 8 of 11 dimensions. Results parallel those of Rogosch and Cicchetti (2005), differing only on three dimensions.

Likelihood of High BPD Score Odds Ratios by Maltreatment Type



BPD Precursors Composite Score is greater than one SD above mean for 15% of sample (n=196). Squares represent OR values. Bars show 95% CI of OR.

Discussion

The results replicated many of the Rogosch and Cicchetti (2005) findings, suggesting that maltreated children may bear greater vulnerability to BPD development. BPD is notoriously treatment resistant, and the symptomatology does not present until adolescence. Early markers could facilitate early intervention.

The particular significance of physical abuse and neglect, lack of significance of sexual abuse, and greater likelihood of males to have high BPD precursor scores are contrary to the clinical literature. These three distinctive findings correspond to results from the first prospective study conducted to identify BPD in adults with documented maltreatment histories (Widom, Czaja, & Paris, 2009).

Whether these findings are anomalies or accurate representations of BPD development can only be assessed through prospective investigations. Future research should address which children at risk for BPD actually develop the disorder in adolescence and adulthood.

References

- Rogosch, F. A., & Cicchetti, D. (2005). Child maltreatment, attention networks, and potential precursors to borderline personality disorder. *Development and Psychopathology*, 17(4), 1071-1089.
- Widom, C. S., Czaja, S. J., & Paris, J. (2009). A prospective investigation of borderline personality disorder in abused and neglected children followed up into adulthood. *Journal of Personality Disorders*, 23(5), 433-446.

Predictors of BPD Precursors Score

Linear Model

Variable	BPD Precursors Composite	
	Model 1	Model 2
Constant	-0.42 ***	-0.40 ***
Gender	0.44 ***	0.44 ***
Any Maltreatment	0.34 ***	
Physical Abuse		0.26 ***
Sexual Abuse		0.09
Neglect		0.20 **
Emotional Abuse		0.03
R ² mean	.08	.08
R ² range across imputations	(.07 to .08)	(.08 to .09)
R ² adjusted mean	.07	.08

***p < .001; **p < .01
n=1281

Physical abuse and neglect are significantly associated with higher BPD Precursor Scores. Males also had significantly higher scores.

For parsimony, several potential predictors that did not prove significant were removed (ex. child race, frequency/duration of abuse, caregiver depression, income, education, and others).